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ABSTRACT

The Model Schools Project sponsored by The National Association of Secondary School Principals calls for the teacher to assume the responsibility of guiding approximately 30 students regarding their schedule and independent study needs and, as a friend, about their everyday problems. The professional counselor's responsibilities are to those students whose problems require help beyond the resources of the teacher-advisor and, as a resource person, to teachers. In the Model Schools Project, the basic purpose of guidance is to ensure the individualization of high school education for all students with all kinds of abilities and from all backgrounds. (Author/MLF)

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THE ROLE OF THE ADVISOR AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR

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Philosophy

The Model Schools Project sponsored by The National Association of Secondary School Principals (1969-74) calls for the teacher to play a pivotal role in all curricular and organizational structures. The most crucial aspect of this increased professional role is the counseling function whereby each teacher assumes the responsibility of guiding 30 students (more or less) regarding their schedule, their independent study needs, and, as a friend, about their everyday problems. This counseling role for the teacher will cast him/her as a personal adviser to about 30 students and conceivably as a member of a guidance team for 60 to 120 students.

A successful secondary school program that seeks to provide individualized learning opportunities for students according to their developing abilities and interests, that capitalizes upon and grows out of the work the pupil has done in the elementary school, and that hopes to join forces with the family in projecting appropriate vocational and academic goals -- such a program will require a strong counseling and guidance program. In this design for high school education, guidance must be viewed as a functioning department in the school, with suitable staff and program. While this program will definitely consist of more individual work than the curriculum in academic subjects does, it can also include large and small group instruction where appropriate.

In the Model Schools Project the basic purpose of guidance is to insure the individualization of high school education for all students with all kinds of abilities and from all backgrounds. This concept demands dual responsibilities for the guidance staff: 1.) to provide individual student services in support of the instructional staff by diagnosing academic and vocational alternatives and developing therapeutic programs consistent with guidance staff competence; and 2.) to provide a systematic instructional program in guidance areas such as school orientation, academic program alternatives, vocational options, available pupil personnel services, test interpretation, and criteria for college and university selection. This instructional responsibility has traditionally not been effective in guidance programs in secondary schools, partially because of scheduling difficulties.

The Guidance Staff - The Advisement Role

Basically, this design for guidance involves a differentiation of guidance roles parallel to the differentiation of general staff roles. The guidance staff should be composed of psychologists, psychometrists, counselors, specialists such as speech pathologists, and audiologists, clerical assistants, technical assistants, and teacher-advisors. Each of these staff functions is different, but

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all can be grouped under three major categories: 1.) professional counseling, 2.) therapy and 3.) advisement. Professional counseling and therapy are so widely known that an elaborate discussion in this context is unnecessary. It is important to note, however, that the professional aspects of counseling require personnel with highly specialized training. It is quite inappropriate for these duties to be performed by teacher-advisors who have minimal guidance training beyond standard teacher preparation.

General counseling is a very different consideration. Teachers--instructional specialists--can and should perform this function for a majority of students. The only students who should be academically advised by the professional counseling staff are those with complex individual problems. The teacher-advisor role calls for advisory functions which are narrowly defined and limited to the selection of academic programs of study and to the knowledge of the student as a person. The purpose is to build a personal rapport between student and advisor which is only possible if relatively few students are assigned to any one teacher-advisor.

Each teacher-advisor should have continuous responsibility for about 30 students. Both teachers and students should select the group and individuals with whom they wish to function. The distribution of responsibility between the teachers should vary according to their own resources, the nature of the groups assigned to them and the planning of any age or grade level activities that might be appropriate.

Students should retain the same teacher-advisor for their total secondary school experience. Each T/A provides a home base in the school for a particular group of students. He is their "friend in court" in dealing with school problems and decisions which affect them. He becomes the professional member of the school staff best informed about their personal and social characteristics, their values and aspirations and their overall school achievement and growth.

In essence, then, the teacher-advisor has the responsibility to interpret for his group the possible consequences of any school program, plan, or decision. The counselor does not, however, assume a therapeutic counseling responsibility with the student. He knows the student well enough to know when additional staff resources should be involved. He should alert the professional counseling staff to problems needing their attention. He should, likewise, alert his instructional colleagues to any special circumstances which might affect their instructional expectations of the student. He helps the student to change his program or to plan his individual course of study. He talks to each of his counselees as a friend, doing his best to gain their confidence and to get to know them well. He encourages each student and reacts to suggestions that he may make. He also takes calls from parents who are concerned about their children's program and various instructional problems. He maintains counseling records on each of his counselees and is responsible for their report cards.

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The Professional Counseling Role

The popular conception of the professional counselor's role is limited to interviewing, testing, and advising individuals. Too often the message has been conveyed that these processes require capacities, training and understanding not possessed by classroom teachers. The result has been to confuse a proper concern for competence in counseling with the propriety of simple advisement. Certainly the professional counseling relationship does involve high levels of specialized professional training and unique competence and, if properly handled, is important to students. However, many problems traditionally dealt with by high school counselors are not counseling problems at all, in the sense that special training beyond instructional competence is required. Academic counseling is the obvious example.

The MSP design does require professional counselors for the guidance staff--in a ratio of about 1 to every 12 teachers--but limits counseling responsibilities to those students whose problems require help beyond the resources of the ordinary teacher-advisor. Often these problems will be of such a nature that the counselor, having made a diagnosis of them, will seek other help--the family doctor, consulting psychologist, or outside professional services. But not over half of the counselor's time should be devoted to this specialty. The greater dimension of the professional counselor's role should be working with teachers and student groups to achieve fuller individualization of instruction throughout the school, to define carefully the appropriate instructional content of the guidance program, and to prepare and present specialized materials as an integral part of the total instructional program.

Professional counselors should be responsible for the group planning of guidance services each year, for mobilizing the resources of the guidance staff to help teachers, for planning and carrying out guidance instruction for the total student body and for special groups at appropriate age levels, and for group and individual meetings with parents and students when professional counseling services are required. The counselor should be available as a resource person to various curriculum meetings; he should supervise the maintenance of individual pupil counseling records; he should process requests from teacher-advisors for statistical data about their advisory groups; and he should evaluate the effectiveness of the use of these data. An increasing proportion of his work should be with teachers rather than with individual students.

The professional staff should provide special services both for individual students and for the school staff. It handles specific personal problems of students upon referral by advisors, teachers, or the student himself. It provides individual and group counseling, either scheduled or unscheduled, for physical, emotional, social, and specialized academic difficulties. It develops and

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administers individual and group testing programs. And it offers extensive in-service training in counseling techniques for faculty and vocational and academic information to students.

The other members of the guidance staff are all specialists of one sort or another--psychologists, psychiatrists, psychometrists, speech pathologists and audiologists, clerical assistants and technical assistants. These function in their conventional roles under the Model Schools Project and, consequently, their responsibilities need not be discussed. It should be remarked, however, that these professional people handle the cases which are referred to them by teacher-advisors through the school counseling office.

Needed Policy Changes

Several basic concepts, then, are clearly implied in this approach to the teacher-advisor role:

1. The concept of the teacher-advisor recognizes that the advisement function is integral to the instructional responsibility of all teachers. The teacher is not only a content specialist but is also a counselor for a specific group of students. In addition, each subject teacher becomes a subject consultant for all students who choose his program. Each subject teacher makes his special expertise available to teacher-advisors so that students are properly advised. The teacher-advisor, of course, will not always be a subject teacher for all his counselees.

2. The scope of pupil personnel services must be clearly relevant to the educational responsibilities of the school. The services should be limited to what can be done well, and for which staff can be provided. Parents must be informed of what school guidance is not as well as what it is.

3. The counseling staff must identify and eliminate unnecessary testing and other habitual practices characteristic of over-emphasis on testing for its own sake without relation to its instructional use. On the other hand, each teacher-advisor must have adequate information readily available on each of his advisees.

4. Teachers must have offices sutiable for interviewing parents and students and for keeping counseling records.

5. The school schedule must be restructured to provide adequate time for the advisement function -- at least 40 minutes to an hour a month, ten or fifteen minutes a week for each student or about 5 to 8 hours a week for a group of 30 students.

6. Teachers in the various subject-matter fields must beome increasingly aware of the interrelationships of their specialty with other departments of instruction as they become more personally involved in academic counseling. Communication between departments must become the first priority.

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Conclusion

If our schools are to become humanistically oriented, humanizing institutions, as contrasted with an ever increasing growth in impersonalization, the teacher-advisor role is a critical variable. It is essential, and of course the right of every person, including those of us who are teachers, that we should be recognized as a person, as a unique being. The teacher-advisor role is such that as a teacher-advisor learns to know his counselees, and as this relationship is strengthened over the years, he is able to help youngsters make better decisions concerning independent study, concerning many other aspects of their own program. I really don't believe that directed self-motivated study will work with great effectiveness for the bulk of our young people until the teacher-advisor role has been fully established. This kind of love, the kind of sensitivity to others which is desperately needed, can emerge in a wholesome, healthy teacher-advisor relationship. It is directly related to large group instruction, to small group discussion, to self-directed study. In a very real sense the teacher-advisor role is the root of any real staff differentiation. It is the most effective basis for any truly meaningful school reform.